



Interpreting Edwina

By Valran Clark

Author of "The Middle of the Tide,"
"The Amateur Child," etc.

OUR acquaintance began abruptly on the deck at Monaco.

"Hello, you're Hester Pratt,"

I stared.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Blakely told us about you."

"Oh, you are Miss Edwina Melver? Mrs. Blakely wrote me—I'm awfully glad—Do you know, have I enough kind of labels on this trunk?"

"Couldn't say. Mother's fussin' now; after she gets through fussin', I'll go and do it. There's heaps of time—boat doesn't sail till noon. Let's sit down; don't know whose trunk it is, and don't care." She took possession of most of the only low trunk in the vicinity, leaving me a seat too narrow for comfort, hunched up her long legs, hooked her arms about her knees, and stared gloomily, her mouth pushed out, at a sea that held, in the sun-saturated blue of its water, the white of gulls, of a sail, of the fresh-painted ocean liner anchored out, all the brilliant, transient beauty of a Riviera morning—a beauty it fairly made your heart ache to leave for the drags of a New York winter.

"It's nice for me," I tried, "cruising into——"

"Yes. You're alone, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't look exciting—the prospect."

I ran my eye over the group.

"Two professors and one professor's wife, three school teachers, a priest, five middle-aged-to-elderly globe trotters," I inventoried. "No, January's the wrong time to be heading for New Yo——"

"There's dirt on your nose. Did you get your suit in Paris? You-all smoke? Got a cigarette?"

"Sorry!"

"You're the youngest one here; you'll eat at our table." She finished her survey of me and disposed of me in the space of one frown. She relapsed into gloom.

I was in process of sizing her up—the raw, long body; the small, white face, freckled faintly, pink-lipped, with its straight, rather delicate nose, its wide mouth, its high cheek bones—when I became aware of a little brow, jaunty woman who sauntered up without haste and whose blue eyes dotted, half-humorously, upon the figure which I appraised so coldly. Her indulgence included all the details: small purple-silk hat, squashed down, purple scarf which trailed the deck, beige-colored silken knee, purple cow-leather sandals. Edwina's mother did not say, "Edwina, your scarf's in the dust," or, "Edwina, pull down your skirt." Instead, she looked down upon her daughter as a

lover might gaze upon an enchanting and absurd little sweetheart, and said:

"I've got everything tugged but the canvas suit case and I can't find that."

"Mother!"

"It will turn up," predicted Mrs. Melver easily.

"It's got my new green dress," scowled Edwina. "Oh, nev' mind, I'll tend to it myself."

"Perhaps you'd better, dear."

"S Hester—Hester Pratt," Edwina remembered.

Mrs. Melver's smile admitted me to the joke of an efficient daughter. She had a rusty little face—weathered brown, stained deep with freckles, from forty-some-odd years of grubbing in her South Carolina flower garden. I learned later; her nose was pert and her smile was merry. "You'll be company for Ed——"

"Hot—I can't bear bein' hot!" fumed Edwina.

"You can cool yourself by just looking at the water," suggested Mrs. Melver. "Did you ever see such blues and such greens—that exquisite soaped green?" She tilted the pert nose as though to sniff the green. "The color, Edwina, of your new——"

"Cigarette," Edwina fretted. "I only——" She caught an aroma, turned. It was a short, thick, middle-aged man, clearly an American, and in spite of slouch clothes and a plaid cap, or perhaps because of his two brief cases and a restless gesture with a paper-thin gold watch, he looked like a person of importance. Edwina hesitated not an instant; she smiled, and I discovered her blue, blue eyes, with the fringe of black lashes as sharp and lustrous as bits of shining black enamel stuck there. "Got an extra one? Cigarette?"

"Ea? Oh, certainly—sure thing." He deposited the two brief cases, produced a flat, gold cigarette case, struck a match for Edwina.

I waited for Mrs. Melver's protest, which did not come.

Edwina continued to smile, but suddenly her smile had shifted from the American and focused in the general direction of Monte Carlo behind his back. There was an awkward moment; Edwina had completely forgotten to thank him.

The thick-set gentleman, who still had the open cigarette case in his hand, turned to Mrs. Melver.

"Will you——" He hesitated.

"Thank you, Edwina doesn't allow me. Edwina——she sparkled——"can't bear silliness in the old."

His black eyes, behind their really delightful twinkle, held a shrewdness; the full curve of his nose hinted at a Jewish strain.

"The old?" he deprecated.

"You know——she rushed in her soft, slurring speech into one of the little anecdotes which were flung across the gap of so many of Edwina's discourtesies—"I once made a fearful break. Edwina and some of the little gals back home were goin' for a moonlight ride——"

"That old one!" groaned Edwina.

"And I wanted to go along. Edwina forbade it, and I argued. Nancy——"

"Mother, keep your voice down," Edwina admonished.

"Nancy—she's my elder daughter—finally enlightened me. 'They don't want you, mother, because they want to smoke.'"

"Let them smoke away," I retorted; "I don't mind!"

"Well, Edwina here simply went to pieces. 'It's what I can't bear, that you, a mother, should countenance smoking!'"

Mrs. Melver's browlike face was all puckered with the fun of it; I looked at her and grinned; our dock acquaintance looked at her and chuckled.

Edwina herself lifted starry blue eyes; murmured vaguely:

"You do see how it would make you feel, with the other gals——"

Again Edwina's attention was riveted; I turned, and found, very much this side of Monte Carlo, the object of her vivid interest in the shape of a trim, personable young man. He was scanning trunks. He discovered the trunk on which Edwina sat without discovering Edwina.

"Here it is! *Voilà!*" A porter came running.

Edwina did not move, and now perforce he had to discover her. He gazed down upon Edwina's cigarette, upon Edwina's silken knee. He stiffened.

"Pardon me——"

There was a crispness to his enunciation, a crispness to the crease of his trousers. He wore a Phi Beta Kappa key, and a small brush mustache, quite recent. His profile was regular and intolerant. Before ever I saw the Cambridge label on his trunk, I recognized him for Harvard—a very young Harvard who had not yet grown out of a dead-serious faith in the system of absolute categories for girls.

Edwina tossed the cigarette aside, came alive like a kitten uncoiling for play from a stupefied nap. She aimed the shaft of her smile at the young man; he did not smile back.

"I am sorry," he articulated with scrupulous courtesy, "to disturb you, but the official insists upon examining the contents of my trunk."

"Oh?" teased Edwina, not stirring.

"Yes."

Edwina sat on; he merely waited, very much aloof.

"Suspicious character?" she gibed.

"Pardon?"

Another wait.

"Why?" prodded Edwina. "There's no customs here—what are they lookin' for?"

"Thing judges and senates have been bought for," murmured Mrs. Melver, easing off the situation.

The young man thawed slightly to the literary allusion.

"The thing judges and senates——" frowned the girl, relinquishing the trunk.

"Gold," said the young man curtly.

"Gold!" laughed Mrs. Melver. "They browsed through our trunks, too, Edwina; we're not allowed to go smug-glin' gold out of the country."

There followed the farce of poking under a top layer of pajamas, correctly monogrammed. Edwina was frankly interested; the young man was aloof, but pink; Mrs. Melver spoke tactfully of the curious cloud above La Turbie.

Now the young man raised his hat meticulously to us and departed.

Edwina bent to the trunk label—"John Porter Daggett"—murmured something about the canvas suit case, and followed him straight.

She paused only to yank the close purple hat from her head; and I sat down under the sudden shock of Edwina's hair—straight, bobbed, flaming.

"Funny little orange top," observed Edwina's mother.

Well, it was funny; but perhaps, too, it was—decorative in its way.

"Time," said the thickset man, consulting his watch, "for the tug." He had, I noticed, long-fingered, slim hands, at odds with the rest of him. His eyes, following Mrs. Melver's, just brushed Edwina. "I've been looking for a red-headed girl."

"Perhaps I can lend you mine," smiled Mrs. Melver.

We hung over the ship's rail for a last glimpse of Monte Carlo, the mountains, the little high, old hill towns, the clouds, like a fairyland blown backward in a bubble of sunlight; Edwina commenced to be bored. We slid down the coast of Italy—ridge after ridge of snow-clad mountains, like opalescent clouds piled up—and Edwina was more bored. We passed Corsica by night, a

high, dark shadow with a tall light, and Edwina was utterly bored.

We watched the prow of the boat cut the water, and Mrs. McIver talked.

"Curious about Edwina, here—she's like no one in either Sam's family or mine. When she was born, I just looked at her, with all that fuzz of red hair, and I felt they'd made a mistake. You know"—with an apologetic laugh—"the poor little Russian prince, Alexis, was born at that time, and I got the idea that somehow they'd shifted them—Alexis was mine, and Edwina was theirs. The odd part of it is he had a McIver look, while Edwina resembled the Russian grand duchess. I wrote my brother: 'Bill, don't breathe it to a soul, but the stork, knowing the poor czarina couldn't bear up under the disgrace of another girl, has gone and played us a mean trick.' Well, Bill sent me an article out of the next *Sunday Times* which told how the new little czarvitch bore no resemblance to either his father or his mother, and he simply wrote on it, 'Honest, Meg, I didn't tell.' " Mrs. McIver's gurgle of laughter still apologized, Edwina yawned audibly.

I looked at Edwina to compare, in wonder, the mother's romantic conception of her daughter with the original. But either the moonlight had changed Edwina, accentuating the wide mouth, the high cheek bones, turning blue eyes green and orange hair silver, lending her a beauty arresting in its strangeness, or Mrs. McIver had done the trick: Edwina might, indeed, have been a Russian grand duchess in disguise.

"Like abed moonlight—those waves as they're flung back," murmured Mrs. McIver.

"If you're goin' to rave about scenery——"

We were alone.

"You know," she continued, "I'm right worried about Edwina. I want Edwina to marry, but I'm fearful she'll

marry just by way of tryin' something new. Nancy, now, is so keen about her library work that it's a sort of guarantee to me she won't marry for anything but love. If there were anything in the world that Edwina wanted to do——"

"A career?"

"H'm! She can dance and she can sing; but she's so delicate—a tendency to colds. Oh, well——"

Our middle-aged American friend of the dock, whose name, we had learned, was Johnson, sauntered by, and I left Mrs. McIver and him deep in a discussion of Barrie's plays.

I was at the hair-brushing stage when Edwina, to my amazement, slammed into my stateroom without knocking. She slumped into the only chair, and announced that she had been playing mah jong with a reporter named Charlie Lauer and some others.

"He's a-nosin' out celebrities for a story—fine chance on this boat." She shrugged. "He's a dab, but young."

"And John Porter Daggett?" I queried.

"A stiff."

"He's an instructor of French at Harvard; has been over studying," I informed her.

"You've been talkin' to him?"

"No, the professor's wife told me."

Now she became confidential about clothes and boys, about the dizzy speed of a young married set to which she had attached herself.

"His stories—well they were the craziest things—he kept me laughin' all evening; there was one—but don't tell mother."

"How old are you, Edwina?"

She was immediately interested in how old I thought she might be, was pleased by my hazard of: "Sixteen."

"I'm nineteen—twenty next summer; I can't bear to get old. I'd just as soon get dead. How old are you?"

I owned my twenty-nine years.

"You can keep an eye on mother,

anyhow. Mother 'and I," she said, "aren't interested in the same things. Mother's always sketchin', and readin' French, and I can't bear——"

"What are you interested in?" I wondered sympathetically.

"(Uuh? Why, I reckon I'm interested in people—young people. And singing—I can sing. And dancing! I like dancing better than anything in the world," she declared with passion. She uncurtled herself from the chair, did two one-steps in the limited space. "And I reckon," she added with unblinking frankness, considering her face in the mirror, "I reckon I'm interested in getting married." She tried a dab of my new muslin-scented powder, turned and kissed me easily, impersonally, like a child, helped herself to a mandarin from the basket of fruit, and lapsed from the room.

"Little Russian Prince Alex——" reached me, as I drowsed off. It was Mrs. Melver and Mr. Johnson still pacing with the moon beyond my open porthole.

I caught fragments at intervals.

"The type, this Donna-May," said Mr. Johnson, "but——"

Who was Donna-May? Familiar name! I slept.

I was reminded of Mr. Johnson's words the following morning. Edwina and a plump young man raced down the deck toward the goal of our steamer chairs; she caught his arm, slid laughing the last few steps past the chair of young Daggett, who did not deign to glance from his book.

"Charlie Lauer," flung off Edwina. "He's on the trail of——"

"Say, I've heard he's Brockman himself—Leon Brockman, big theatrical producer," panted the young man earnestly. "You've been talking to him. Is it true?"

"His name," replied Mrs. Melver, "is Mr. Johnson."

"On the passenger list, yes. But suppose he's Brockman traveling incog?"

"Well, ask him," she laughed; "and let me know what he says. I'm interested."

"Gosh, an interview from Leon Brockman on any——"

"Edwina," murmured Mrs. Melver, her eyes following them down the deck, "looks rather well in that blue——"

"Is he Brockman?" I asked idly.

"It's a secret. You wouldn't repeat it, but don't tell Edwina. Edwina," she chuckled, "never can keep anything."

"Then he really is the big——"

"Yes. He was talking me about this Donna-May——"

"Musical comedy?" I fixed her.

"He wanted her for the part she's been playing in London, but it's a second rôle, and she won't take anything but the lead in New York. She's not suited for the lead, he says, and besides, he's already engaged Nietzsche for that. He's stuck. It would be nice," said Edwina's mother, "if Edwina could do the part."

I stared. No, it was not a joke. Mrs. Melver was serious.

"What," I managed feebly, "is the part?"

"Edwina dances remarkably well, and she has a voice. Why, it's *Joanne* in 'Madame Mariska,' that pretty little Viennese thing. We saw it in London, and I remarked at the time that Donna-May resembled Ed——"

"Vesuvius!" interrupted the purser.

"Ah, 'Vesuvius' with his plume of smoke." Oh, purser, do you ever have fancy-dress dances on the boat?"

"But, yes, madame, if the passengers wish it. One sells masks and fancy-dresses in the barber shop. There is few young people this time, but——"

"It would be—fun," said Mrs. Melver thoughtfully.

It was too late in the afternoon, when we weighed anchor at Naples, to do either Pompeii or Vesuvius, so we was-

dered up and down the surging, narrow streets of old Naples. Mrs. Melver went from ragged children in a patch of sunlight to a little street shrine with a virgin, floating cherubs, burning candles, and wished passionately for her sketchbook and colors; Edwina protested the smells, and fiercely resented the flat basketful of little raw, silver fish which bowed to her from the head of a passing boy. In between times Mrs. Melver was oddly pertinacious in her pursuit of an apron. She rummaged through pinwheels, sausages, calicoes, flacons of Chianti, false faces, fluted macaronis, in the heterogeneous assortment of the little street shops. Edwina objected: if her mother kept on collecting "silly trash," they'd have not a cent left over from the trip.

"Sam," Mrs. Melver laughingly explained to me, "has said we may keep anything that remains from our three thousand, and Edwina's economy springs from a vision of clothes."

"I want to go back to the boat," stated Edwina suddenly.

"A colorful apron, made peasant style. Here——"

"But what would you do with it, mother?"

"It's colorful," I admitted.

"Green, purple, royal blue," gloated Mrs. Melver; "no clash with—— What, dear?"

"I want," insisted Edwina ominously, "to go back to the boat. I'm tired. We'll go now."

"How much—oh, what is the Italian?"

"Now—now—now!" Thoroughly amused, I was treated to an exhibition of raw temper. Edwina stood in the middle of the narrow street, blocking traffic, and stamped her foot. Her face got red; she looked as though she would cry; she was crying.

"One minute," soothed Mrs. Melver. "Five lire? It's only five lire, Edwina. I'll have to go now." She turned to

me. "You stay as long as you want, but don't lose your way to the dock," she laughed back.

I found her, an hour later, in her steamer chair, an old, snug, brown-wood hat raked over her eyes, squinting contentedly up at Vesuvius. She had her sketch block on her knees, a bottle of dirty water at her elbow, and she was screwing her brush around in her mouth.

I was curious as to how she would explain Edwina's tantrum: would she ignore it, or would she plead that Edwina was "not well?" But Mrs. Melver did neither—she did not pass over the outburst, nor did she fall back on that final maternal apology.

"Just like Edwina," she chuckled, stressing it, and proceeded to regale me with reminiscences of Edwina's worst rages. Mrs. Melver had just the right blend of laughter and fondness for her daughter's absurdities; if you did not see it, with her, as the richest joke that Edwina should stand in the middle of a street of Naples and bawl for her own way, you did catch from Mrs. Melver, in spite of yourself, a certain feeling of indulgence for the wrong-headed little carrot-top. Yet the thought occurred to me if Mrs. Melver could carry off for Edwina that exhibition, what couldn't she carry off for Edwina?

That was Naples. It was later, I remember, that Mrs. Melver and I started a search for Edwina. We found her in the smoking room playing mah jong and drinking liqueurs with Charlie Lawer and several of the ship's officers. Edwina had a crème de menthe with cracked ice and a straw; her small face was flushed, and her eyes, as she sipped from the pretty, frost-green concoction, were green themselves, with black pupils, like a cat's eyes. Indeed, there was a restless beauty to Edwina, as bright and as strange as the gleam of her fantastic orange hair beneath the electric lights, so that Brockman—or

Johnson—who played voltaire at the next table, watched her with a considering interest. Even young Daggett, who sat in a corner very much alone and drank black coffee, was aware of Edwina with a certain high disdain; while Edwina, for her part, was recklessly conscious of the young man's disapproval. The purser was excusing himself with his French bow; Edwina jerked her bare arm from beneath Lauer's plump hand, tossed her hair from her eyes, called to Daggett a challenge to take the purser's place.

"Thank you, I don't play."

Edwina flamed her chagrin.

It was at that inopportune instant that Mrs. Melver presented herself.

"Mather, you look like a tramp in that hat! Why can't you fix yourself up decent?" It was a bad moment; Edwina's mouth was pushed out; she was audible and obvious to the entire smoking room.

But Mrs. Melver, who did veritably resemble a tramp, only pulled the hat farther down over her freckled nose and struck the attitude of a jumpy little toad. The moment passed in a laugh—even Daggett smiled.

"Thou bye," murmured Mrs. Melver in my ear, "is finer than the others."

"Ginger ale or cognac?" Johnson hailed her eagerly. We slid into the leather seat beside him, and he and Mrs. Melver lost themselves in a discussion of springer spaniels, and Scotch tea cakes, and the Mammotte.

Palemo followed. We lay, in the morning, in the harbor of the Golden Shell, and Edwina asked me, out of Mrs. Melver's hearing, if I would let her mother go ashore with me, while Mrs. Melver informed me, in an aside from her daughter, that we would run away from Edwina. We had a delightful day. We gathered impressions of little, dusty donkey carts with bright Bible scenes painted on them, of Ara-

bian Nights cathedrals with golden mosaics and whole altars of lapis lazuli, of gorgeous paisley shawls on incredibly poor peasant women, of deep-purple violets for sale on the streets and golden-brown amber for sale in the shops. Mrs. Melver bought easily, with a giggled: "Edwina will be furious when she sees." Her taste was odd. She passed up a silken strand of genuine Sicilian ambers for a string of ugly, variegated beads as large as Easter eggs. She pursued indefatigably a book of French nursery rhymes with music, a difficult thing to find in a Sicilian town, and a colored-print handkerchief, a quest not unreasonable in a city of calico kerchiefs, but elusive in the particular combination of greens and purples which she had in mind. We rounded up both finally, and celebrated with too much Chianti in a restaurant. Mrs. Melver tied the bright-spotted handkerchief over her hat and beneath her chin in a knot, and chanted a French song from her colored picture book.

"Edwina," she murmured contentedly, as she drained her third glass, "makes me stop with one."

Edwina herself, when we came aboard, was gloomily eating the raisins from her tea cake and turning the pages of a book from the ship's library entitled "Love in a Little House;" John Porter Daggett, who held down a neighboring wicker table, was absorbed in a small, crumbly, brown-leather volume which looked like a first edition of Molière at least. Edwina had the beginning of a cold, and she was correspondingly cross.

"If you'd put on your woolen stockings——"

Edwina sniffed.

"And leave them on——"

Edwina snuffled.

"I don't like——"

"Oh, mother, quit your fassin'!"

"But I'm sorry, dear, that you have to go and get a cold just at this time;

I particularly wanted you to—to be in voice."

"He's a pig," announced Edwina, glowering at Daggett, who gave her his cool, handsome profile as he passed our table. "Do you know what he said to Charlie Lauer? He said: 'There's not a nice gal on the boat.' Considering I am the only gal on the boat——"

"I can see——" admitted Mrs. Melver impartially. "Some of the things you do, Edwina——"

"What have I done?"

"It's my objection," concluded Mrs. Melver calmly: "you spoil your chances with the really fine boys."

"Fine boys?" scorned Edwina. "Fine—pigs? He can go to—to hell."

Her mother let that pass.

Yet it was a judgment on her Edwina which Mrs. Melver, whatever she might say, was not extreme to her rest, and I was amused at her tactics on the following morning. She was poring over her book of French nursery rhymes:

"*Etrennes*," she puzzled; "*etrennes*." She waved to Daggett, who happened along. "You are an instructor of French, aren't you?"

Harvard warmed to the call of learning. Now their heads were together; Daggett was giving her the lines in beautiful French; she was giving him the line with the beat of a hairpin on her chair arm.

They were laughing over one when Edwina came by. She loitered; she stopped.

"Oh!" Mrs. Melver accepted her casually. "I was telling Edwina it would be nice if she would learn to sing some of these. Listen, dear:

*"En passant par la Lorraine,
Avec mes sabots——"*

"But what does it mean?" wondered Edwina. "Sabots?"

There was the barest chilly pause; then:

"Wooden shoes, you know," he translated it for her.

"Edwina's French!" giggled Mrs. Melver. "We were in a tea room in Nice and Edwina asked the waiter for 'b-o-o-ted toast,' with an air of speaking in the purest Parisian."

"Well, it is 'toast,'" protested Edwina.

But the ice was broken.

Edwina gathered the ship's cat into her arms, and subsided definitely into her deck chair; with the cat purring against her cheek she looked picturesque and content. By one of her easy transitions Mrs. Melver had shifted the spotlight to her daughter.

"This little old Scotch gentleman had such a delightful way of telling Edwina that he liked her hair straight better than all furzed up. 'Little lady,' he said, 'I see only your hair when it's stuck out; it's lovely hair'—indeed, it was lovely hair with the sun on it as even young Daggett must have remarked—"but I like to see you."

"Come on, mah jong," cooed Charlie Lauer, stopping before Edwina.

"Don't want to," she replied laconically.

Did the shadow of Daggett's little brush mustache conceal the faintest smile of gratification as Lauer slouched off? I was not certain.

I drowsed; woke to:

"Edwina's French is hopeless, but if you'd just take her in hand, Mr. Daggett."

"Would you?" smiled Edwina.

"An hour a morning?" he suggested.

Now, but for Edwina's cold, it never could have happened as it did. She was in bed with the cold until long past Gibraltar. Young Daggett inquired about her politely. He dawdled about with Edwina's mother, and Edwina's mother spun him all the little whimsical yarns that backed up her own romantic version of Edwina.

"Waiters," I would catch, "discover her prejudices and spoil her fearfully. Why, there was one at the *Miramère* who just knew, by some seventh sense, that Edwina would have a passion for apple sauce with mince."

And again:

"There she stood, that little slim, straight figure in pajamas with all that startled mop of red hair, and I said, 'Edwina, what is wrong?'"

It went on and on, a colorful, most intimate picture of a young girl. Young Daggett was virgin ground, one of those rigid boys whom you knew, at a glance, to be innocent of even a sister, and Mrs. Melver's familiar little sketchings of Edwina must have caught at his imagination.

I can't tell you, even now, how she did it. She guarded Edwina's voice like the voice of an opera singer, and of course that made its impression. She fluctuated chiefly between Daggett and Johnson, though she scattered miscellaneous little anecdotes of Edwina among the rest of the passengers, too, until the whole ship was inquiring with interest and solicitude for "the little, red-headed girl." She merely talked—that is the nearest I can come to it. She talked; she talked consistently upon one subject; and she was never a bore. She made no pretensions for her daughter.

"Mount Ema in Spain!" she giggled. "But even poor little Edwina would know better than that." And again: "You haven't discovered Edwina's one artificiality? Why, her eyelashes! No, they're pink, naturally."

Then, when we were in midocean, after almost a week's absence, Edwina reappeared. She still had her snuffle, her eyes were watery and pink lidded, and her mouth, in a little pinched, white face, was larger than ever. She was not pretty, but she carried her head high, and she could dance! She did a loose shuffle and canter with the plump Lauer youth, and her feet, her whole body,

had the easy rhythm of a dancing colored boy's. She did a variation of a fox trot with the little French purser, and the looseness was curbed to tricky little side steps and heel business, executed to a sharp and clicking nicety. Edwina might be raw and long as to body, but she had both the genius and the rules, the abandon and the technique, there in the tips of her silver dancing pumps. She discarded the purser; her eyes roved over Johnson—on the side lines with Mrs. Melver—found Daggett. The boy, handsome in correct evening attire, was hung uneasily in a doorway.

Edwina, with a lift of her shoulders, and a faint smile, invited him to dance with her.

Daggett's eyebrows made a barely perceptible, rather nervous negative.

Edwina's mouth was instantly pushed out in a scowl; with a single gesture she ran the fingers of her two hands through her hair so that it stuck out, on either side, in two orange tufts. She stood an instant longer, a green-and-silver figure, swaying. Then she picked the Russian drummer out of the orchestra, flung herself, with that contortionist, into an amazing series of gymnastics.

Young Daggett's whole body became one with the unbroken crease of his trousers; he turned on his heel and departed.

They finished to applause. But Edwina's gaze slid off the dazed and excited little drummer, side-stepped Charlie Lauer; she left the room abruptly by young Daggett's door.

Now Mrs. Melver, who held the purser by a coat sleeve and was the center of a rapidly collecting group, gathered me in.

"And I can see you, Professor Silla, as an Arab street vender: Mrs. Silla's kimono, a turban, rugs over one arm, beads over the other—and presto! You, Hester"—she addressed me—"well, why

couldn't you take off Edwina herself? Reveled red for——"

"What?" I asked. "Why?"

"The fancy-dress party. The purser here"—she tweaked his sleeve—"thinks we're all too old. But to-morrow night we'll show him! Now remember, gals and boys"—she spatted on school teachers, priest, and middle-aged travelers alike—"remember, if one gal of you or one boy of you dares appear out of costume—a costume of some kind——"

All the following day the plot thickened. There were whispered consultations, bursts of laughter, glimpses through stateroom doors of Chinese table runners and Persian scarfs in process of conversion. Mrs. Melver was the center of it. It was not until late afternoon that she gave up inventing costumes for every one else, and came in search of Edwina. Edwina was to be found bent studiously to the delayed first French lesson with Daggett.

"It is," he was saying, "an idiomatic expression."

Edwina, her blue eyes on his profile, was murmuring her complete comprehension.

An hour later, in quest of pins, I hesitated before the Melver stateroom. Edwina's raised voice reached me:

"I won't! I just won't!"

"But, dear, don't you see——"

I tapped, opened to Mrs. Melver's: "Come in!"

I gaped at Edwina, and I began to see a light. Over a green underskirt and a white peasant blouse stocked in orange, she wore the apron, with its purples and greens and royal blues, from Naples. About her neck she wore the bright beads like Easter eggs and tied over her orange-red hair and knotted under her chin the purple-and-green kerchief, both from Palermo. Her high cheek bones were accentuated with two comical, perfectly round spots of orange rouge. She stood, in one

purple-silk stocking and one green-silk stocking, and refused to put on the huge, fur-topped, white-satin bedroom slippers which her mother had picked up from Heaven knows where.

"I sure 'nough won't! You just want to make me a freak, that's what."

"But, Edwina, I only——"

"Won't!"

"Well, if you won't, you won't." Mrs. Melver even achieved a laugh.

"But, my dear, do you mean to say you don't adore yourself? Why, you're like a figure out of 'Chauve-Souris.'"

I rushed in.

"'Chauve-Souris?'" said Edwina doubtfully.

"Oh course, if you want to go as a little malatan fairy or a Martha Washington like any ordinary, merely pretty girl! With another orange blorb on your chin——" Edwina considered the effect in the mirror.

It was like all fancy-dress parties, with the usual collection of kimonoes and Spanish shawls. Toward the close of the evening Mrs. Melver, a merry little tramp in patches and tin cans, dispensed with the orchestra, and herself played the "Music Box" tune for Edwina's solo dance. It was one of those little thin, dainty, tinkling things, all mincing little runs and stiff poses, and Edwina, looking like a new kind of doll, did it to perfection. Johnson, a highlander in plaid scarf, a lady's accordion-phased skirt hitched up about his bulky waist, and a whisk broom dangling at his belt, turned the page for Mrs. Melver, and watched Edwina with his shrewd eyes narrowed. The music box died off.

"She looks——" added Johnson.

"Doesn't she?" I suddenly felt a purpose moving beneath Mrs. Melver's eagerness. "And she can dance?"

"Yes; not so important. Can she sing, is the question. Let's hear——"

"Not a note!" Her hand came down on the piano in a crash of chords, mixed with her laughter. "She has a cold,

and I'll not have her spoilin' her voice, even for you. Before we reach New York, I promise it. But she has a sure 'nough lyric soprano—you'll see! Why, her singin' teacher says——"

"Say, you *are* Brockman!" blurted Charlie Lauer, whose plumpness had been poured into one of the crew's middy suits. "I just got a squint at a telegram addressed to Leon Brockman."

"Telegram?"

"Uh, the purser. But you're Brockman, and I want to know——"

"That damned Nietza again——"

"Nietza?" grabbed Lauer. "What show——"

"Oh, Heaven! 'Madame Mariska'—title role—Little Shubert some time in March," said Brockman curtly.

"'Madame Mariska?'" Edwina wondered. "My mother and I saw that in London. You mean, Mr. Johnson here is the man who——"

"He is putting on that same little musical play in New York, dear. You may remember," murmured Mrs. Melver irrelevantly, "how much Donna-May resembled you, dear—the little one who wore the little bright peasant's costume like yours."

"Peasant's costume, like mine?" echoed Edwina, staring down at her own purples and greens. Even Edwina seemed to sense some hidden purpose lurking behind her mother's random words. "You mean this Donna-May——"

But Daggett, who had made concession to the occasion to the extent of appearing in a particularly immaculate tuxedo costume, cut in. There was nervousness beneath his dignity, and he spoke with the clipped sharpness of a man who has steeled himself to courageous action.

"Would you care to take a turn about the deck—a—er—short constitutional?"

Edwina wavered; she wanted to hear.

"And say, I want to know—the New York cast for Madame——"

Edwina relinquished curiosity; she turned to Daggett with her starry smile.

"Reckon I would. Only I'd rather take a seat up on the top deck."

Well, Mrs. Melver's lurking purpose was soon ship's talk; it was more than a purpose, it was an established fact. Whether Edwina, who "never could keep anything," boasted, or whether Mrs. Melver, in her maternal pride and her absolute certainty of the result, dropped a word or two, I am uncertain. At all events, the rumor spread: Brockman had discovered a new musical-comedy star in the person of the little red-headed girl! Mrs. Melver, interviewed by Lauer in his official capacity of reporter, laughingly supposed that it was true—or would be true as soon as Edwina had entirely recovered from her cold and could demonstrate her voice.

Edwina, next interviewed, verified her mother's statement. She supposed she might play *Joanna* of "Madame Mariska" in New York this winter; she supposed she might be starred alone in something after that; yes, she liked dancing better than anything in the world. Already Edwina's manner had taken on, to the amusement of her merry little mother, something of the airiness of the star. To both Edwina and Mrs. Melver, neither of them doubting the girl's ability for a moment, it was a simple matter, merely a question of the timing. Brockman himself, approached by Lauer, would not commit himself beyond an uneasy statement to the effect that "the whole thing hung on the little girl's voice."

So we waited. The entire ship waited for Edwina's song. Edwina's hoarseness became a matter of public concern. And when we cut into the Gulf Stream the wrong way and the rough weather at last struck us, people kept up with an idea of being on hand for the little red-headed girl's concert, which was scheduled for the last night at sea.

Daggett, during the interval of suspense, had faded into Edwina's background. But he did stick close to Edwina, and there was something dogged and tight—stretched—in his stiffness of bearing now. On the afternoon of the concert, I watched him spanning, with a hand, the distance from the ship to New York, on the chart which marked the daily runs. Edwina came along.

"Anxious?"

"No."

"Then why—— How long do you make it?"

"To-morrow afternoon—without a fog." He stared fixedly at the map; his voice lacked its usual, clean-cut enunciation.

There was a hush.

"Sorry," drawled Edwina.

"Are you?"

"Here, maybe you're measurin' it wrong." Their hands touched. "I am—sorry." Edwina's cheek brushed his sleeve; suddenly her whole body relaxed against his like a little girl coming close. It felt for him, through my own body, the warm flush, the physical admission of the child's loveliness which I had felt that first day when Edwina had surprisingly kissed me.

Daggett did not move. His chin, from where I sat, was pink.

"Stiff—stiff—poker stiff!" I glibbed him mentally.

"Let's—go up on the top deck."

He switched frigidly.

"Yes."

The climax of the storm arrived simultaneously with the climax of Edwina's concert. It is not my intention to go into the details of the concert. It is enough to say that Mrs. Melver took her seat at the piano, and was sorry there was no score of "Madame Mariska" to be had—it was her one apology—but Edwina would just have to give some of her own simple little songs. So Edwina hugged a post, while

the ship lurched three ways at once, and opened her generous mouth, and sang! She sang a little thing about swallows, and another little thing about a four-leaf clover, and a final little thing about yellow roses and death. Edwina's lyric soprano trembled, and I tried to assure myself that it was the trembling of the ship. There was a little strain of doubting uneasiness over the audience, but Mrs. Melver's triumphant nod and smile of encouragement to her Edwina—"On, on! we have practically done it!"—was a sight to inspire confidence. The voice lifted up, up, up on a wave, and, between Edwina and the ship, I thought we should never have done with rising. Could I be wrong? But, no; one glance at Brockman's face, patient, expressionless, convinced me that I was right. It was the kind of soprano that renders "I Love You Truly" at small home weddings.

She recovered from death and the yellow roses and broke forth into an encore:

*"En passant par la Lorraine,
Ave nos saluts——"*

Now Daggett's work with her was apparent; pride in his pupil, I noted, struggled in Daggett with some deeper emotion. The boy's ear was perhaps sensitive to music!

"Recevez trois capitaines——"

Mrs. Melver plucked Brockman with a bright smile which clinched their bargain. I slipped from the room.

Applause reached me first, where I had hid myself in the deserted writing room. Leon Brockman reached me next.

"I didn't promise a—— I only said I'd hear her voice," he growled.

"Well, you heard! Dashed if I can break it to that little woman, but—look here—you're her friend."

"No!"

"Her dancing would have passed. But Nietzsche can dance like a whirl-

wind—can't sing above a muted orchestra; Morely can dance, but he fails to music. Whole blooming cast can dance. It's a singer we need. Can you hear her"—his slim, artist's hand made a gesture over his large stomach—"sobbing the 'Bohemian Love Waltz,' finishing the whole darn show? Why——"

"Sh!"

Lauer lounged through on his way to the bar; stared at us curiously.

"You——" he pleaded with me.

"No, no!"

"But some one has got to tell her now! I can't have——"

"Hush!" I warned him. "Your chance—here they come." It was Mrs. McIver, stepping jauntily, her blue eyes, her entire, quick little person bright with victory; she was followed by Edwina and Daggett.

"About Edwina's part in 'Madame Mariska——'"

Brockman wiped a moisture from his upper lip.

"Edwina would love to do the part for you——"

"But——"

"But I thought it would be nicer to break it to you at once. You can't be any more disappointed than I am—than Edwina is—but the fact is"—she laughed—"the fact is, Edwina had decided to be married."

I turned. It was then I discovered the detail: John Porter Daggett possessed Edwina's hand in a firm grasp that challenged the world; Edwina's blue, blue eyes possessed Daggett's handsome profile in a gaze that frankly adored.

"You mean," struggled Brockman, "that she can't——"

"We mean," Daggett summed it up

concisely with a rigid, blushing dignity, "that it would be inadvisable for my—my wife to accept a position on the stage. Of course you understand——"

"Of course!" breathed Brockman.

"But, Edwina, you're sure, quite sure," charged Mrs. McIver, "that you love John better than your career? It's dancin', remember, and you adore dancin'; and singin'"—Brockman shuddered—"and you like to sing. You're quite sure?"

Edwina came from Daggett to Brockman. Did she, for a moment, waver? The very boat hung poised with Brockman in suspense.

"Sure," sighed Edwina; Brockman felt for his handkerchief.

"You see!" bubbled Mrs. McIver.

"Couldn't help listenin' in," blurted Charlie Lauer, tearing himself from a deep chair; "but say! First Brockman himself and inside dope on the coming theatrical season, which is enough; then Brockman discovers a new star, which is more; then the new star relinquishes the stage for love, which is the pig's chin whiskers. I see the headlines! Tell me, Mrs. McIver——"

Mrs. McIver was going strong:

"I remember, when Edwina was a little gal——"

"Mother, if you just could stop talkin'!"

"Even then she could sing—remarkable in such a baby. You recall that old one: 'Yip-yiddle-y-ye!' " giggled Mrs. McIver. "Well, I had her in church one day, and the choir had just finished singing 'Rock of Ages,' when I looked up and saw Edwina standing in the middle of the aisle, in a little white dress with green ribbons, her hair shining like a halo——"



As to growing old—women have the advantage over men; for the average man's hair turns gray five years earlier than woman's. But then women have more than nature's aid on their side when it comes to delaying the ravages of age.